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THE DREW LAB AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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# Transitioning to Grad School

Welcome to the new school year!

I love this time of year, as the weather cools I find the entire campus pregnant with anticipation for the new students to arrive. This year is especially exciting for me as we welcome the first class of MA students that I had influence over their admission. While the current MA students are doing wonderful things, and I'm incredibly proud of them, they were handed to me. The ones coming in now I interviewed, read their applications and cajoled to come to Columbia.

I take my role as the MA program director very seriously and I am constantly looking for ways to improve our program. One of the new things we are doing this year is a MA retreat at [Black Rock Forrest](#). The goals here are to first and foremost to provide an opportunity for the cohort to get to know each other. Grad school is tough, and having a good and supportive cohort can really make the difference between surviving and thriving in school.

Secondly, one of the biggest challenges new graduate students face is adapting to the cultural expectations towards work in grad school. Quite often in undergrad it was sufficient to read the assigned readings and perhaps one or two recommended readings. While we certainly want that to happen in grad school that's just going to take care of classes. As a graduate student you've got your own research to take care of, and that requires reading papers, tons of papers, outside of class. To help get this year's students interested in reading we are setting up a mini journal club at the retreat. Here they will cycle through and read a classic and a modern paper on a variety of topics and hopefully think about how those topics can help them frame their research.

Lastly one of the biggest challenges we face going to school in New York City is that well, we are in New York City. There is a wealth of distractions going on in Manhattan, and I need to caution the students that while they are going to see that new indie band, or check out the hot new [Negroni](#) bar, their colleagues in Manhattan KS are probably going to be in the lab. However both of them will be competing for the same jobs and/or Ph.D. spots. I'm not saying that the incoming students need to be in the lab all the time; in fact I also encourage them to take a day off a week and do something completely [different](#). What I am saying is that being in NYC provides a wealth of distractions and I've seen what happens when students do not spend the time to set up an effective study regiment.

Please note, there will not be trust falls during this retreat.

If you are interested in seeing what papers we've chosen please feel free to look [here](#).

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